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Tutoring ESL Students: Issues and Options

Muriel Harris and Tony Silva

For students whose first language is not English, the writing classroom cannot provide all the instructional assistance that is needed to become proficient writers. For a variety of reasons, these students need the kind of individualized attention that tutors offer, instruction that casts no aspersions on the adequacy of the classroom or the ability of the student. We should recognize that along with different linguistic backgrounds, ESL students have a diversity of concerns that can only be dealt with in the one-to-one setting where the focus of attention is on that particular student and his or her questions, concerns, cultural presuppositions, writing processes, language learning experiences, and conceptions of what writing in English is all about. Typically, the tutorial assistance available for these students is provided by writing centers, and much of the personal help available there is precisely the same as for any native speaker of English: the goal of tutors who work in the center is to attend to the individual concerns of every writer who walks in the door—writing process questions, reader feedback, planning conversations, and so on. But also typically, tutors, who bring to their work a background of experience and knowledge in interacting effectively with native speakers of English, are not adequately equipped to deal with some additional concerns of non-native speakers of English—the unfamiliar grammatical errors, the sometimes bewilderingly different rhetorical patterns and conventions of other languages, and the expectations that accompany ESL writers when they come to the writing center. Tutors can be reduced to stunned silence when they try to explain why “I have many homeworks to completed” is wrong or why we say “on Monday” but “in June.”

Tutors need some perspective on rhetorical approaches other than those they expect to find, such as a direct statement of the topic or discourse with a linear

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development. When tutors find, instead, an implicitly stated point or when they become lost in a long, seemingly meandering introduction or digressions that appear irrelevant, they flounder, not recognizing that implicitness and digressions may be acceptable rhetorical strategies in the writing of some other cultures. Because the need to learn more about how to work with ESL writers in tutorials is immediate and real, one of the authors of this essay, a writing center director, asked the other author, the coordinator of ESL writing courses at our university, for help. The conversations that ensued are summarized here in terms of the questions that guided our discussion of various issues and options, and our hope is that our exchanges will be of interest to others who train tutors to work with ESL students. We also hope that composition teachers looking for guidance when conferencing with ESL students will find useful suggestions for their own interactions with these students.

Plunging In: How Do We Prioritize among Errors?

In the peer tutor training course in our writing center, peer tutors are especially eager to meet and work with ESL students, but their initial contacts can be somewhat frightening because some unfamiliar concerns crop up. To the untrained tutor's eye what is most immediately noticeable is that a draft written by an ESL student looks so different. Vocabulary choices might be confusing, familiar elements of essays are missing, and sentences exhibit a variety of errors—some we can categorize, some we cannot. Tutors' first concern is often a matter of wanting some guidance about where to plunge in. Where should they start? New tutors who have not yet completely internalized the concept of the tutorial as focusing only on one or two concerns think initially it is their responsibility to help the writer fix everything in the draft in front of them. As tutors learn the pedagogy of the tutorial, they become more comfortable with selecting something to work on for that session, but they still need suggestions for a hierarchy and some sense of what is most important.

When tutors ask how to prioritize among errors, they should be encouraged to begin by looking for what has been done well in the paper, acknowledge that, and go from there. Such a suggestion fits in well with the tutorial principle of beginning all interaction with writers on a positive note and reminds us that ESL writers should not be separated out as different or unlike other students in this regard. And tutors should also be encouraged to let their students know that errors are a natural part of language learning and that most readers will be interested primarily in what writers have to say. So tutors need to distinguish between errors that will interfere with the intended reader's understanding of the text (global errors) and those that will not (local errors) and to give priority to the former. To illustrate for tutors this notion of global vs. local errors at the sentence level, the following example can help. Suppose an ESL student, attempting to describe some classmates as uninspired by a particular lecture,

wrote: “Those students are boring” instead of “Those students are bored.” This would constitute a global error. On the other hand, a construction such as “Those student are bored” would represent a local error.

Using Research: How Helpful Is It to Look for Patterns?

With our heightened awareness of multiculturalism, we are also more aware of cultural preferences that are reflected in writing, such as the often-cited Asian preference for indirection. The question in working one-to-one with ESL students is how helpful such generalizations really are. Work in contrastive rhetoric would seem to be particularly valuable because it describes patterns of rhetorical preferences in other cultures, patterns which may explain the seemingly inappropriate rhetorical strategies used by ESL students. But to what degree is such knowledge useful? To what extent should we help tutors become aware of such differences? On the one hand, there is a danger that they can begin to use general patterns as givens, expecting all speakers of other languages to fit the models they have learned. On the other hand, without any knowledge of cultural preferences tutors are likely to see differences as weaknesses and to assume that the ESL student needs basic writing help. For example, instead of introducing the American intolerance of digression as culturally appropriate for American discourse, a tutor might treat an ESL student purposefully using digression as an inadequate writer who has problems with organization. If the tutor assumes that student is deficient, the tutor’s tendency might be to work on outlining and to leave aside any rationale for why digressions should be avoided. Tutors need to introduce preferences and conventions of American discourse for what they are—alternate conventions and preferences.

However, to consider the extent to which such knowledge is helpful, we have to begin with some background information. The study of first-language transfer at or below the sentence level, typically referred to as “contrastive analysis” (see Brown, pages 153–163, for a concise summary of this work), and the study of differences in rhetorical preferences among various cultures, usually termed “contrastive rhetoric” (see, for example, Grabe and Kaplan; Leki), have given us useful insights into how the writing of ESL students may differ from accepted standards of American discourse. The question of the transfer of first-language (L1) linguistic and rhetorical patterns to second-language (L2) writing has been a central and contentious issue in ESL studies since the beginning of work in this area. In the early days it was believed that L1 transfer (then called interference) was the primary if not exclusive cause of L2 problems. Therefore, it was felt that if one could catalog the differences between a student’s L1 and L2, one could anticipate—and thus be prepared to deal with—any problems that student might encounter in the L2. However, research showed that this was not the case. There were many problems that could not be accounted for by L1 interference. Other factors, such as cognitive development, prior language

and/or writing instruction, and experience were also implicated. Today, it is generally believed that transfer can be positive or negative and that it is only one of the potential causes of L2 writing problems. Thus we have to approach the question of the use of such knowledge with some hedging. On one hand, being cognizant of typical problems associated with particular groups of ESL students can be helpful—especially if tutors work largely with one or two particular groups. At the very least, this would make tutors very familiar with these problems and perhaps enhance their ability to deal with them. However, tutors need to keep two things in mind: (1) not all members of a particular group may manifest all of the problems or cultural preferences associated with that group; and (2) not all problems will be a result of transfer of L1 patterns.

A related issue is that of culturally conditioned patterns of behavior, some articulated, some not. In the Writing Lab's tutor-training course, we dip into Edward Hall's work to help tutors-to-be become aware of the variety of human behaviors which are conditioned, consciously or unconsciously, by one's culture. Since some of these behaviors can impede communication in a tutorial, it's important to recognize that such differences occur. A few favorite topics among the tutors-in-training are their reactions to the preference for or avoidance of eye contact, the differences among cultures in regard to the amount of space that people expect to maintain between themselves and others, the acceptability of touching between strangers, and so on. The cautionary advice about not doing too much large-scale or whole-group predicting is worth recalling here, but we also have to be aware that we might make unconscious judgments about others based on our expectations about such behaviors. In addition, we have to deal with different cultural assumptions about time, keeping appointments vs. showing up (if at all) much later, and so on. Understanding and accommodating cultural differences is, to a great extent, what ESL instruction is all about. This is especially true when working with students who are very new to and not very cognizant of the workings of American culture.

Recognizing Differences: How Do We Distinguish Language Learning from Writing Process Needs?

There is a tendency to think about ESL students as if they're all alike when obviously they're not. And in writing centers our focus is on working with individual differences of all kinds. So when the tutor and student negotiate the agenda of what they'll work on, the tutor has to do some assessment about a variety of things, including some sense of what skills the student has or doesn't have—not an easy matter when it might be that the writer's low level of language proficiency, not weak writing skills, is causing the problem. For example, does the thin, undeveloped two-paragraph essay an ESL student brings in indicate the need to talk about how to develop topics or is the student's lack of language proficiency in English keeping her from expressing a rich internal sense of what she wants to write about? As tutors we know that our conversation

would take on a somewhat different emphasis depending on our analysis of the situation. The question then becomes one of how to decide whether the student needs help with language or with writing processes.

While the distinction between language proficiency and writing ability is not clear cut, it is crucial to make such a distinction in order to understand and address a given ESL writer's problems (see Barbara Kroll's "The Rhetoric and Syntax Split" for an excellent discussion of this issue). In some cases, a very low level of English proficiency will prevent a student from producing any kind of coherent prose. For such a student some basic language instruction, preceding or accompanying writing instruction, would be indicated. Then there is the student with enough English proficiency to make it unclear whether problems result primarily from rhetorical or linguistic difficulties or from both. There are a number of ways tutors can proceed when trying to ascertain the cause of the problem—assuming they will see the student more than once. They can try to locate the student's results on general English proficiency tests or tests of English writing ability. They can consult with an ESL professional. They can analyze some samples of the student's writing and make a judgment of their own. They can ask the student's opinion about what the basic difficulty is.

Exploring Writing Process Differences: Do ESL Writers Compose Differently?

A rather small but growing body of research, reviewed and synthesized by Silva, compares the composing of ESL and native English speaking (NES) writers. The findings of this research suggest that while the composing processes of these two groups are similar in their broad outlines, that is, for both groups writing is a recursive activity involving planning, writing, and revising, there are some salient and important differences. The findings (and these should be seen as very tentative) suggest that adult ESL writers plan less, write with more difficulty (primarily due to a lack of lexical resources), reread what they have written less, and exhibit less facility in revising by ear, that is, in an intuitive manner—on the basis of what "sounds" right, than their NES peers. One implication that can be drawn from this research is that those who deal with ESL writers might find it helpful to stretch out the composing process: (1) to include more work on planning—to generate ideas, text structure, and language—so as to make the actual writing more manageable; (2) to have their ESL students write in stages, e.g., focusing on content and organization in one draft and focusing on linguistic concerns in another subsequent draft; and (3) to separate their treatments of revising (rhetorical) and editing (linguistic) and provide realistic strategies for each, strategies that do not rely on intuitions ESL writers may not have.

Confronting Error: Does It Help to Categorize Sentence-Level Concerns?

When working on grammar with native speakers, tutors categorize types of error so that they can address seemingly disparate problems by focusing on a larger

language principle at work. While it's useful to know how to do this so that one can figure out what the problem is and explain it in an effective way to the student, such categorization in the writing of ESL students is often difficult. To do such categorizing well, tutors may need to take a course in the grammar of modern English. Or maybe a short in-service seminar or self-study would do the trick. In any case, a merely intuitive understanding of how English works would not be sufficient for helping ESL writers—who do not share the tutor's native speaker intuitions and who often need explicit explanations. We should also remember that the "rules" of English vary in terms of level of usefulness. Most don't work all the time; some have as many exceptions as cases covered by the rule. So knowing the rules can help tutors a lot; but they can't count on the rules solving their problems in every case. Such advice should make tutors feel more comfortable with their role as writing collaborators rather than as grammarians whose function it is to spout rules. Tutors are there to help with the whole spectrum of writing processes, not to be talking grammar handbooks.

Although tutors do not work primarily on grammar and mechanics, some ESL writers—especially those whose first acquaintance with English was as a foreign language taught in classrooms in other countries—have a tendency to want to know rules. For example, in a tutorial with a native speaker of English or a student born in the United States who spoke another language before entering school, the student might ask "Is this sentence OK?" or "How do I fix this sentence?" But an ESL student who comes to the United States after studying English as a foreign language in another country is more likely to ask "Why is this wrong?" Such students seem to have a strong inclination toward organizing their knowledge of English by rules. Though things are changing, many foreign language classes (and this includes foreign language classes in the United States) privilege the learning of grammatical rules, of learning about the language as an object, and neglect the learning of how to actually communicate, orally or in writing, in the foreign language. Certainly, this can make learners very rule-oriented in their outlook. However, there is something else that may also contribute to an ESL student's seeming preoccupation with rules. It's necessary to keep in mind that non-native speakers of a language (especially ones with lower levels of second language proficiency) simply don't have the intuitions about the language that native speakers do; that is, it is harder for them to recognize when something "sounds good." Therefore, in lieu of these intuitions, these students will have to rely on explicit rules to a certain extent.

Adjusting Expectations: How Do We Withstand the Pressure to Correct Every Error?

ESL writers often come to the writing center seeking an editor, someone who will mark and correct their errors and help them fix the paper. On one hand, as tutors we are collaborators who listen to the student's concerns when setting the

tutorial agenda. On the other hand, as tutors we also want to begin with rhetorical concerns before looking at sentence-level matters. This causes delicate negotiating between tutor and student when these differing preferences for the agenda collide. But tutors should be firm about dealing with rhetorical matters before linguistic ones (recognizing that sometimes this distinction is hard to make), a sequence as beneficial for ESL writers as it is for native speakers. Tutors should remind ESL writers that their linguistic options may be determined to a large degree by the rhetorical requirements of their papers and that, correlatively, it doesn't make sense to focus initially on grammatical or mechanical problems which may disappear as a result of rhetorically-based revisions.

A related problem is that when ESL students are particularly insistent on having tutors correct all grammatical errors in a paper, tutors are at a loss to explain in meaningful ways why this is not productive. Resisting such pressure is very difficult, especially when ESL students are writing papers for other courses where they think the paper should be "correct." One way to address this is for tutors to adjust expectations. Tutors need to tell ESL writers that it is unrealistic for them to expect to be able to write like native speakers of English—especially when it comes to the small but persistent problems like articles and prepositions. Tutors can explain that even non-native speakers of English who live in an English-speaking area for many years and write regularly in English maintain a written accent. It might help to compare this to a foreign accent in pronunciation and to remind ESL students that most native speakers (their professors included) will probably not penalize them much or at all for minor problems in their writing. It also helps to remind such students to focus on substance and not worry so much about style. But there are faculty who do have unrealistic demands about the level of correctness, who expect non-native speakers of English to write error-free prose—not to have a written accent, so to speak. If an ESL student's teacher has such unrealistic expectations, then the student is justified in seeking out editing help, and a native English speaking colleague, friend, or tutor is justified in providing such help.

Another way that tutors can deal with students' insistence on having all errors corrected is to explain the role of a tutor. ESL students need to know that tutors are expected to help them with strategies that will make them effective, independent writers. We need to explicitly state that tutors are supposed to be educators, not personal editors. This problem is often a result of a mismatch between the assumptions and expectations of tutors and students, though tutors do tend to hang on to their kind-hearted desire to help the student turn in a good paper. Writing center specialists endlessly quote Steve North's now famous one-liner that the tutor's job "is to produce better writers, not better writing" (438). But we still suffer pangs when the student leaves with less than an "A" paper in hand. Offering editorial services is not a learning experience—except for the editor, of course—and tutors need to resist their impulse to help as much as ESL students need to resist their desire to have every grammatical error corrected.

Setting Goals: What Can We Accomplish?

Since second-language learning is typically a long, slow process, tutors have to confront the realities of the time constraints they face in tutorials. Sometimes tutors meet briefly with ESL writers who are about to hand in a paper, sometimes tutors may have a few more leisurely tutorials with the same student, and sometimes tutors are able to meet over a more extended period of time, including sessions when the student is not working on a particular paper. The question then becomes one of deciding what can reasonably be done in the varying situations tutors find themselves in. In terms of last-minute encounters, a tutor can't do much with a paper that is about to be handed in—except act as a proofreader or offer moral support. And neither of these has much instructional value in the long run. However, dealing with an early or intermediate draft of a paper at one or more short sessions can be very useful if tutors can resist trying to deal with all of a draft's problems at once. It is more realistic and more useful to focus on one or two salient difficulties, the things that strike the tutor as most problematic for the reader. To do more would probably overload and frustrate the student and wind up being counterproductive. Going this slowly will probably not result in great improvements in a particular paper, but is more likely to facilitate real learning and writing improvement over time.

When tutors are able to meet with ESL students over a period of time and meet when the student is not working on a particular paper, there are several kinds of tutorial activities that might be useful in helping the student build language proficiency. To begin this sequence, a tutor should first look at one or more samples of the student's writing to get a feel for what linguistic features need to be addressed and in what order (global first, local later). Then, always working with a text the student has written previously or writes in the tutorial, the tutor can help the student identify and remedy errors or help the student generate lexical and/or syntactic options that would improve the student's text. This sort of procedure would help with building language proficiency and might also help the student develop effective personalized strategies for generating language, revising, and editing. Such an approach also harmonizes with the writing center philosophy that what we do particularly well in the tutorial setting is to help writers develop strategies individually matched to their own preferences and differences. Because the tutorial is also especially well suited to working through writing processes, to engaging in various processes such as planning, organizing, revising, and editing with the writer, working through various texts the ESL writer is drafting and revising is easily accomplished in a one-to-one setting.

Resisting the Urge to "Tell": How Do We Stop Supplying All the Answers?

Since writing center pedagogy has given high priority to working collaboratively and interactively, a major goal of a tutor is to help students find their own

solutions. Tutors thus don't see themselves as "instructors" who "tell" things. Yet the ESL student cannot easily come to some of the realizations that native speakers can as a result of tutorial questioning and collaboration. To confound the problem even more, while the tutor is uncomfortable straying from the role of collaborator, ESL writers are likely to find such a situation strange or uncomfortable when they come from cultures/educational systems where teachers are expected to be "tellers," where those who don't "tell" are seen as poor teachers, or where such casual interaction with relative strangers is seen as odd or inappropriate. This means that tutors cannot assume that a pattern of interaction that is common and accepted in their culture will be familiar or comfortable for their ESL students. Therefore, tutors might find it useful to make sure that they and their ESL students understand each other's goals and expectations vis-a-vis their tutoring sessions.

In terms of the tutor's role, there may have to be adjustments in their pedagogical orientation. Tutors who work with ESL students may have to be "tellers" to some extent because they will probably need to provide cultural, rhetorical, and/or linguistic information which native speakers intuitively possess and which ESL students do not have, but need to have to complete their writing assignments effectively. That is, regardless of their level of skill in collaboration or interpersonal interaction, tutors will not be able to elicit knowledge from ESL students if the students don't have that knowledge in the first place. This is not to suggest that "telling" should become a tutor's primary style of interacting with ESL writers; they should use it when they feel it would be necessary or appropriate, just as they assume the role of informant occasionally when working with native speakers of English. Tutors can also make minor accommodations in their tutoring style when working with ESL writers. For example, with non-native students who are used to hearing directive statements from teachers, Judith Kilborn has suggested that where it is appropriate, tutors modify the normal mode of asking questions so that instead of asking "Why . . ." or "How . . .," tutors can, for example, say, "Please explain. . . ." An answer to a relatively open-ended request for explanation might be more useful and enlightening for both the ESL student and the tutor.

Making Hierarchies: What Aspects of Grammar Are Most Important?

Although tutorials should begin with discussions of larger rhetorical concerns, at some point ESL students will want help with grammatical correctness. When tutors do confront working with grammar, problems with verb endings and tenses, prepositions, and deleted articles often are the most noticeable. But are these the most useful things to start with? One way to define the most important areas is functionally; that is, the ones most important to address are those that most interfere with the reader's understanding of what the writer wants to say (global errors) regardless of their structural characteristics. Research suggests that ESL writers most commonly make the following errors:

Verbs

Inflectional morphology (agreement with nouns in person, number, etc.)

Verbal forms (participials, infinitives, gerunds)

Verb complementation (the types of clauses or constructions that must follow a particular verb)

Nouns

Inflection (especially in terms of singular/plural and count/mass distinctions)

Derivation (deriving nouns from other parts of speech), e.g., quick—quickness, which often seems quite arbitrary to non-native speakers)

Articles (related to problems in classifying nouns)

Use of wrong article

Missing article

Use of an article when none is necessary or appropriate

Prepositions (primarily a result of limited lexical resources)

Knowing which one goes with a particular noun, verb, adjective, or adverb

These four error types account for most of the errors made by ESL writers with a fairly high level of English proficiency; ESL writers with lower levels of proficiency may also exhibit more problems with basic sentence, clause and phrase structure—which (when combined with vocabulary limitations) result in writing that is very difficult to decipher. Article problems can be important, too; that is, they can seriously obscure meaning in some contexts. But they generally do not cause readers any serious difficulties, and because they are so hard to eradicate, they should not be a high priority for tutors. It might help both tutors and ESL writers to think of article problems in writing as akin to a slight foreign accent in writing—something that doesn't pose serious difficulties and disappears only gradually—if at all.

When working with the complicated matter of articles and prepositions and non-rule-governed matters such as idioms, tutors need some new pedagogies as well as guidance for explaining topics not normally discussed in grammar handbooks. But, while we can develop an explanation of article use in English, such an explanation will not be simple by any means. It would involve making sequential decisions about the noun phrase that an article modifies—common or proper, count or non-count, singular or plural, definite or indefinite. Then, of course, there are the several classes of special cases and the many outright exceptions to the rules (Ann Raimes's *Grammar Troublespots* is helpful here; see 85–92). ESL writers could understand such explanations—but it's not clear that this understanding would translate into greatly improved performance in making correct article decisions while actually writing. Article use can improve gradually with increased exposure to English, but it's not realistic to expect that

an ESL writer will ever use articles like a native speaker does. ESL students should be encouraged to do the best they can and then get a native speaker to proofread their work—if proofreading is absolutely necessary. As for preposition problems, they are lexical rather than grammatical problems. We either know the correct preposition in a given context or we don't—there are really no rules we can appeal to. Therefore, ESL writers need to learn prepositions the same way they learn other vocabulary items—through study or exposure to the language. Idioms are also a lexical rather than a grammatical matter. Second language learners usually have a keen interest in idiomatic expressions and are eager to learn and use them. Tutors can capitalize on this interest by providing students with idiomatic options for words and expressions they have used in their text. Both tutor and student might find this a useful and enjoyable activity. One proviso: When introducing an idiom, tutors need to also supply information about the appropriate context for the use of that idiom in order to avoid putting the student in a potentially embarrassing situation.

Encouraging Proofreading: What Strategies Work Well?

With native English speakers we are often successful in helping them learn to edit for correctness by reading aloud, something some ESL students can also learn how to do. Some are able to find their own mistakes, even add omitted articles, and it really works. But for other ESL students, this doesn't seem to be an effective strategy. ESL writers who can't successfully edit “by ear” aren't proficient enough in English to have a “feel” for what is correct and what isn't. It follows that those with higher levels of proficiency will have more success with reading aloud, but even the most proficient aren't likely to display native-speaker-like intuitions. Therefore, some recourse to more mechanical rule-based proofreading strategies or to outside help, such as a native speaker reader, will probably be necessary.

Adding Resources: What Are Useful Readings for Tutors?

Since many tutors and directors would like to better prepare themselves to work with ESL students but have limited time to spend, we will limit our suggestions for further reading to a small fraction of the abundant literature produced in recent years on ESL writing and ESL writers. The resources described in this section were chosen on the basis of their timeliness, breadth, and accessibility.

The first resources are book-length treatments of issues in ESL writing and writing instruction. One is Ilona Leki's, *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers*. This introductory book addresses the history of ESL writing instruction, relevant models of second language acquisition, differences between basic writers and ESL writers, personal characteristics of ESL writers, ESL writers'

expectations, writing behaviors, and composing processes, contrastive rhetoric, common sentence level errors, and responding to ESL writing. The second is Joy M. Reid's *Teaching ESL Writing*. This work deals with the special problems and concerns that distinguish first and second language writing instruction, addressing in particular the variables of language and cultural background, prior education, gender, age, and language proficiency. Reid also provides an overview of different ESL composition teaching methodologies and offers specific information on developing curricula, syllabi and lesson plans for basic, intermediate, and advanced ESL writing classes. Also useful are two collections covering a broad range of issues in ESL writing. The first is Barbara Kroll's *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom*, which contains thirteen papers in two major sections. The papers in the first section address theories of L2 writing and provide overviews of research in a number of basic areas of ESL composition. The second section is comprised of reports of empirical research on current issues in L2 writing instruction. The second collection, Donna M. Johnson and Duane H. Roen's *Richness in Writing: Empowering ESL Students*, includes eighteen papers in three sections which deal respectively with contexts for ESL writing, specific rhetorical concerns of L2 writers, and cultural issues in the writing of ESL students.

Two additional resources are the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, a scholarly journal which publishes reports of research and discussions of issues in second and foreign language writing and writing instruction, and *Resources for CCCC Members Who Want to Learn about Writing in English as a Second Language*, a fact sheet of information about professional organizations, conferences, publications, and educational and employment opportunities for those interested in working with ESL writers. (For a copy of the *Resources* fact sheet, write to Tony Silva, Chair, CCCC Committee on ESL, Department of English, Heavilon Hall, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907-1356.)

Conclusion

ESL instructors and writing center people need to keep interacting with and learning from each other. We each have insights, methods, research, and experiences to share. For those of us in writing centers, it's useful to know that writing center tutors can draw on both research and language teaching approaches used in ESL classrooms. Writing center directors can share with ESL teachers one-to-one pedagogies that work in the writing center as well as our perceptions of how individual differences interact with various classroom pedagogies on different students. We can also share our awareness of the kinds of questions students really ask, our first-hand observations of how students cope with writing assignments and teacher responses, and our encounters with non-native differences that interfere with learning how to write in American classrooms. Such information can only serve to illuminate the work of ESL teachers.

Similarly, insights from ESL writing theory, research, and practice can help writing centers, and mainstream composition in general, to deal effectively with their increasingly multilingual and multicultural student populations.

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